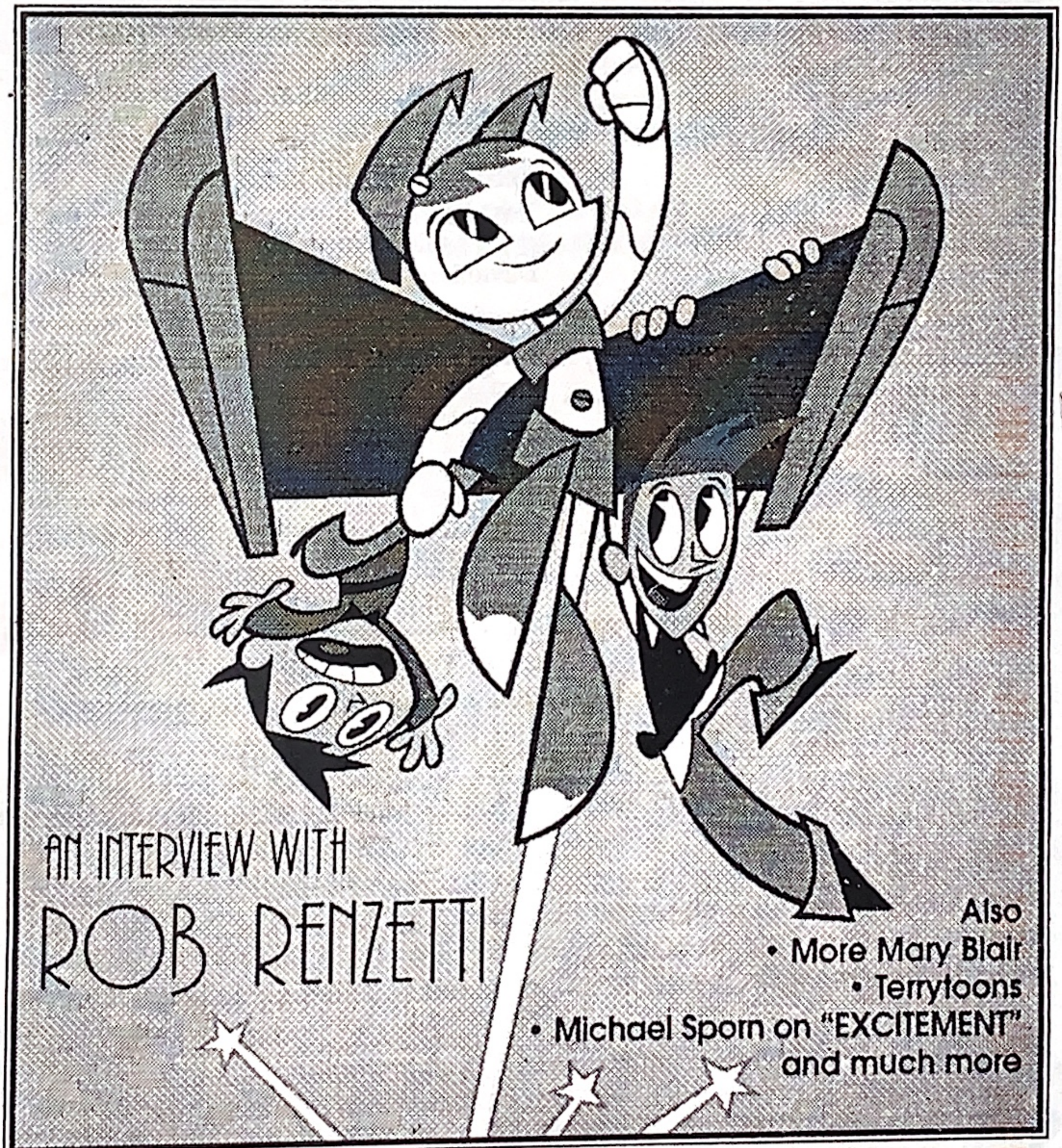
ASIFA EAST

The International Animated Film Society

ANYMATOR

November 2003 Issue



AN INTERVIEW WITH

ROB RENZETTI

Also
- More Mary Blair
- Terrytoons
- Michael Sporn on "EXCITEMENT"

and much more

Be sure to check out original animation art from My Life As A Teenage Robot at the ASIFA-East Animation Art Auction hosted by Auctioneer, Tom Warbuton. Wednesday Nov 12. 7 PM. SVA 209 E 23RD St. (BTWN 2nd/3rd Ave) 5th Floor, room 502

ASIFA East

The International Animated Film Society Northeast /New York Chapter

A Program of the New York Foundation For The Arts

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DID YOU KNOW?

Jacob Burns Film Center presents:

The Wide World of Animation - Wednesday, December 3, 2003, 7:15 PM
Fjodor Khitruk and the End of the Soviet "Disney"

After a 1961 visit to the Zagreb Animation Studio, whose artists, influenced by UPA, had been pioneering a radical departure from Disneyesque kitsch, Russian animator Fedor Khitruk returned to the Soyuzmultfilm Studio in Moscow to direct award-winning work whose innovative graphics completely broke with classical technique. This Program features Khitruk's influences, his greatest work and the work of his proteges, Yuri Norstein and Eduard Nazarov.

The Program is introduced and discussed by David Ehrlich, Independent animator, former ASIFA Vice-President and professor of animation and animation history at Dartmouth College.

$5 Students, $8 JBFC/ASIFA members, $12 nonmembers.

For more information and directions visit www.burnsfilmcenter.org

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT DAVID B. LEVY

November Letter From the President

Welcome to Asifa-East reloaded, redux or whatever else you want to call us. We're back with a vengence. As of this month our newsletter is back to its monthly status! We have Mark Bailey to thank for that. He's generously stepped foward to lend us a hand and this is his maiden-voyage issue. So... help us celebrate by smashing your newsletter with a bottle of fine champaign. Go on. I'll wait here.

Not to be outdone, Andrea Breitman and her band of merry websters have got the website back up. This is no small achievement. Andrea was keen to do the job ever since she learned that her predecessor, Michael Dougherty, went on to script X-Men 2 (no fooling). Andrea is looking for groovy links, articles, postings and artwork for the site. She hopes that this will all lead her to write the script for Jeepers Creepers 3.

Seriously, This is YOUR website. Help us make it great! Check out what we've done so far. Visit us at www.asifaeast.com but, don't forget to wipe your feet before you come in.

Visit us at www.asifaeast.com

DID YOU KNOW?

INDEPENDENT SPIRITS opening at The Quad

INDEPENDENT SPIRITS: THE FAITH & JOHN HUBLEY STORY opens at the Quad on November 28. It's a one-hour documentary on the lives and work of Faith and John Hubley and will be shown for one week along with two Hubley shorts, the Academy Award-winning THE HOLE (1965, by John and Faith Hubley) and NORTHERN ICE, GOLDEN SUN (Faith Hubley's last film, completed shortly before her death in 2001). The documentary was directed by Sybil DelGaudio and produced by Patty Wineapple with completion funding provided by ITVS.

The film has been screened at numerous festivals, including Hiroshima, Ottawa, Mill Valley, Provincetown, USA Festival, NY Expo of Short Film and Video and New Haven, among others. Last spring, the film was invited by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to participate in its 21st Annual Contemporary Documentaries Series, highlighting "important and innovative films considered by the Academy."

The Quad Cinema
34 West 13th Street
New York, NY 10011
212.255.8800

For more information and directions visit www.quadcinema.com/

VIEW POINT AIEM

EXCITEMENT

by Michael Sporn

There are a couple of animation books that I thought I'd call to your attention.

My favorite animation book of the past ten years is not a big coffee table book; it's not filled with hundreds of brilliantly colored cartoons. I think it is just about the best history of animation's golden age ever written. Michael Barrier's book, HOLLYWOOD CARTOONS, is a must read for any enthusiast of the medium. Barrier builds the real story around hundreds of hours of interviews with animation's greatest names. His information wreaks of accuracy and his sharp opinions are well informed. He does favor the Warner Bros. cartoons, though the best writing, for me, is on the Disney studio in the formative years. It's a good book; one that will not only inform about the period and the workings of some of the studios, but will inspire with the detailed story of these films and the people that made them. Just released in paperback.

John Canemaker's THE ART AND FLAIR OF MARY BLAIR is a beautiful book with lots of illustrations focusing wholly on one artist, Mary Blair. Lots of her pre-production drawings and watercolors are displayed. Blair was never one of my favorite artists, but her work as displayed here would certainly inspire me to produce good art for the films involved. There's lots of creativity on display and a good knowledge of the craft and the medium. It's another good book from Canemaker. My favorite of his books is still BEFORE THE ANIMATION BEGINS: THE ART AND LIVES OF DISNEY INSPIRATIONAL ARTISTS. Blair is also featured in that book, but his writing on Eyvind Earle is sensational. (How does he turn out so many, so good, so informative animation books? Keep up the work, each any every one gets the juices flowing.)

These books are enormously important to me to keep me excited about the medium. My big problem is that, in the past, I've had this feeling from some films I'd seen. The charge I got from SLEEPING BEAUTY or TALE OF TALES or ROOTY TOOT TOOT or WINDY DAY is one that got me drawing and painting and animating with a fury. A glimmer of that feeling comes through in these books (and probably a couple of other art books), but the sad fact is that animated films don't inspire me any more. I want the charge but rarely get it. The only inspirational animated films, for me, in the last few years were MT. HEAD by Koji Yamamura and Miyazaki's PRINCESS MONONOKE and SPIRTED AWAY.

However, I'll keep looking. I love animation and hope BROTHER BEAR will be better than the reviews I've read. I hope it makes a mint so that, yet again, Disney can't proclaim 2D animation dead.

ANNOUNCEMENT

JOHN CANEMAKER to Visit MoMA for MARY BLAIR Lecture

JOHN CANEMAKER appears in person at the Museum of Modern Art on Friday, December 5 with a colorful and profusely illustrated multimedia presentation: THE ART AND FLAIR OF MARY BLAIR, based on his new Disney Editions book.

The 6:30 pm lecture/demo will be followed by a book signing, plus a rare 35mm screening of Disney's ALICE IN WONDERLAND, the 1951 cartoon feature principally art directed by Mary Blair (1911-1978).

Using nearly 300 illustrations, Canemaker will describe the art and life of Blair, an amazingly prolific and gifted designer/colorist who was one of the few woman artists to reach the top creative rungs at the Disney studio. She profoundly influenced the color and design of many classic Disney animated features, including THE THREE CABALLEROS, CINDERELLA, and PETER PAN, as well as theme park attractions, most notably the "It's A Small World" boat ride created for the 1964 New York World's Fair. Trained by Pruett Carter at Los Angeles' Chouinard Art School during the Depression, Mary Blair became part of the important regionalist California School of Watercolor and exhibited widely. To commercial projects, she brought an underlying visual sophistication and skill to her deceptively simple faux-folk art style. Although veering towards abstraction, her artworks were admired by Walt Disney, who responded to the storytelling aspect of her paintings. He instinctively used her art -- simultaneously futuristic and primitive-looking -- to mediate transitions for his films and other projects in America's evolving culture.

John Canemaker is one of America's most respected animation historians; he is the author of nine acclaimed books, including "Walt Disney's Nine Old Men", and a tenured professor and director of the animation program at New York University Tisch School of the Arts. His articles appear in the New York Times and he has also designed, animated and directed animation sequences for Peabody and Academy Award-winnning documentaries. His short films are part of the permanent collection at the Museum of Modern Art and distributed in dvd format by Milestone/Image Entertainment.

Visit johncanemaker.com

For ticket info call the box office: (212) 777-4900
MoMA Film at The Gramercy Theatre
127 East 23 Street at Lexington Avenue
New York, New York

or visit the MoMA website:
http://www.moma.org/visit_moma/momafilm/index.html

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A Q&A Interview with *My Life As A Teenage Robot* creator, Rob Renzetti

- by David B. Levy

My Life As A Teenage Robot creator, **Rob Renzetti**, sat down for the Asifa-East interview to discuss the nuts and bolts that give life to the newest NickToon. Special Thanks to Fred Siebert and Ani Martirossians for helping to put all this together!

DL-Describe your background prior and up to your first work at CN on such shows as the PPG.

RR- I grew up in Addison, Illinois. A suburb about a half-hour west of Chicago. I graduated as an Art History major from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. I went on as a film major at Columbia College in Chicago and finally ended up at Calarts in Character Animation. My first work experience was as an Animator in Madrid, Spain working on episodes of Batman the Animated Series in the summer of '92.

DL- What shows did you work on at CN and it what capacity?

RR- In the fall of '92 I was hired at Hanna-Barbera which eventually morphed into Cartoon Network Studios. While it was still HB I worked on 2 Stupid Dogs as a storyboard artist and then director. Created my own short called "Mina and the Count". And finally was a director, writer and storyboard artist on Dexter's Laboratory.

After it turned into CN, I returned as a director on PPG and Samurai Jack. I ended up as supervising director on Robot Jones.

DL- Was Teenage Robot offered first to CN before landing at Frederator/Nickelodeon?

RR- No.

DL- What was the process once Frederator picked up your pitch? Did you make a Teenage Robot short at Frederator to sell to Nickelodeon?

RR- TR started as a short on "Oh Yeah Cartoons" and as all shorts did, it started with a casual verbal pitch to Fred followed by a 2 page outline. Since I was "in-house" and had done 10 shorts before it, the process was very familiar and informal. From there we made a 7 minute pilot.

DL- What has been your experiance with focus groups onTeenage Robot? Does Frederator utilize focus groups before going further with a creator's idea?

RR- In this case Nickelodeon did not do a focus group before picking it up as a series.

DL- CN was criticized at the launch of the "What A Cartoon" shorts program for "copying" the look and feel of Nick Animation. Now, Fairly Odd Parents and Teenage Robot, have brought a CN look and sensibility to Nick. Are their any distinctions left between the two major cartoon producing channels? Are there any differances in the way the develope and produce shows?

RR- With talent crossing back and forth between the two, you could say that there is a "cross-pollination" process that occurs. As a creator, I have been fairly consistent in the style of what I do, no matter where I do it. To the credit of both networks, they both give their show creators a lot of room and freedom to develop the kind of shows they want to produce.

You can ask the respective PR departments to delineate the differences that they think exist.

DL- What have your learned from CN creators' Genndy Tartakovsky and Craig McCracken that you're able to use on your own show?

RR- All of us learned a lot together doing Dexter's Lab. We were lucky to have a small group of like-minded people who had the same taste in movies and cartoons and to have the opportunity to try those ideas on a show that we considered "our" show. I think those ideas or the "style" that we developed there continues to inform all our work.

Genndy is a more instinctual filmmaker and Craig is more analytical. With Genndy the question is always whether something "feels" right or not. From him the greatest lesson I've learned is to always trust your gut. This doesn't mean that everything you do will be perfect or hilarious but it gives your work consistency, integrity and personality. Audiences respond to that.

Craig loves to come up with theories and themes for his cartoons. There are always many layers that give his stuff a richness that you don't get from most cartoons. But the thinking that goes into his stuff doesn't weigh things down. Craig's work feels light and fast. His cartoons are like a nutrient-rich cream puff. I am constantly striving to try to match this combination of depth and lightness.

DL- What do Genndy and Craig think of your show?

RR- I recently had lunch with Craig and he seems to be a genuine fan. I haven't had a long talk with Genndy recently but he saw a couple episodes and thought it looked cool.

DL- Did you take any key CN personale with you from your CN days to work on Robot? If so, whom?

RR- My most important collaborator is my art director Alex Kirwan. He started out working at HB and had a stint at CN on "Time Squad" but we became friends and partners during our "Oh Yeah" days at Nick. We worked on each other's short cartoons. Some other key people that have CN/HB history are BG designer Joseph Holt, BG painter Seonna Hong and storyboard artist Brandon Kruse. As do my line producer Debby Hindman, production manager Ani Martirossians and production coordinator Charlie Desrochers.

DL- The retro-futuristic look of Teenage Robot seems to be plucked right off the poster art from the 1939 World's Fair in NY. What were your design influences?

RR- Both Alex and I have a great fondness for thirties cartoons but we're also big fans of the highly stylized look and amazing color theory employed in the UPA stuff. At this point we thought fifties looking stuff had been done to death. We wanted to do a stylized, flat show but felt that grounding it in thirties design elements would give it a different feeling than the other shows out there. What we didn't want to do was pure "rubberhose" thirties characters against typical thirties cartoon backgrounds.

Alex was the one to come up with the idea of referencing thirties poster art. We found it had this great highly stylized look that was just as flat and "designy" as any fifties stuff. The limited palettes gave us the UPA-ish feel we wanted although the color choices are different. Joseph Holt and Seonna Hong have really done a great job translating this look into our production BG's

DL- Besides the eye-popping visuals, Teenage Robot also features sharp scripting, not unlike the dialogue heard on Buffy The Vampire Slayer.

RR- Thanks. I'm a big fan of Buffy.

DL- Can you describe how episodes are written for *My Life As a Teenage Robot*? How does the storyboard artist fit in to the equation?

RR- Once the premise is approved we write the story in outline form. We do not script the show before it goes to storyboard. There is a lot of visual humor in the show and I think a lot of that gets squeezed out in script driven shows. The outline gives the storyboard artist the freedom and room for visual storytelling. It also gives her or him the responsibility of coming up with a large portion of the dialogue. The rough board is pitched and the Nick execs and I have our notes. Before we record I go through the final board and make my final tweaks.

DL- In the episode, "I was a preschool dropout", there is an inpromptu song number that breaks out as the preschoolers play at being "robots". As Jenny trys to protest, her cries become part of the song's mix. For a moment,this truly unexpected sequence takes on a life of its own. Do you look for sections in each show to try something off the beaten path?

RR- That was the idea of storyboard artist Brandon Kruse. Using outlines as I stated above gives you the room for such sequences. We do look for these opportunities in each show with varying degrees of success.

DL- Although Jenny was created as a super crime fighting Robot by her Mom, her world-saving adventures decidedly take second place to her "teen" life with her high-school pals. Villans and peril seem to show up just when they are needed according to the needs of the story. This is at odds with CN's Samurai Jack where ACTION is king. How do you find just the right blance between action, drama and comedy?

RR- I'm a story junkie and sometimes we overdose on plot points. That said, it was a conscious decision to concentrate more on the teen life side of the equation because that's where Jenny wants to focus. The great thing is that the balance between action and comedy can change with every episode. Going forward we will hopefully do more 'action-packed' episodes now that the characters are established.

DL-The episode, "Ear No Evil", makes several allusions to Walt Disney's Dumbo. Jenny, an outsider, shares an obvious kinship with the little elephant. Jenny's outsider image is further reinforced in the series with shades of bigotry and injustice. Do you have any plans to explore this serious aspect of the show further?

RR- I don't think you will ever hear a promo that begins with "Tonight on a very special Teenage Robot....". The show will always be humorous and the heavier shades will usually be pretty light. Kids pick up on these aspects of the show without having to focus too strongly on it.

DL- Teenage Robot features a rich side cast of background characters, like Mr. Mezmer (an icecream parlor operator), that sport thick foreign accents. Was the ethnic tinged work of the Fleischer studio an influence? And is the name Messmer a nod to Otto Messmer, creator of Felix the Cat?

RR- The Fleischer studio is probably my favorite classic cartoon factory. I especially love the Popeye shorts. Accents are used mostly as a quick way to help distinguish new characters. I also like to use them to subvert our expectations for certain characters with the most obvious example being Brit and Tiff.

Mr. Mezmer is a reference to Felix's father.

DL- What are the non-animation related influences that have shaped your style?

RR- Hitchcock was an early and strong influence. The early films of Sam Raimi and the Coen Brothers were eye-opening experiences just when I started working in the industry. "The Hudsucker Proxy" is a great resource for anyone interested in visual storytelling. Chris Ware's comics are awe-inspiring visual wonderlands.

DL- What is your opinion of the rival robot show on CN, Whatever Happened to Robot Jones? And is there any chance we'll see Jenny battle Robot Jones on TV's Battle Bots? Just a thought.

RR- I actually worked as supervising director on the first season of Robot Jones as I stated above. Since it is so different in terms of style and tone I consider it more of a comrade than a rival. I love the show.

I'm sure we will see a battle/team up when all the entertainment conglomerates eventually merge into one worldwide media empire.

DL- Your show is made at the Nick Toons studio in Burbank, CA. How much interaction does your crew have with the other in house productions?

RR- The studio is a very friendly place and there is a lot of social interaction and studio-wide events. There are a lot of good people and great artists working here.

DL- Where is Teenage Robot now in production? Will there be another season? A feature?

RR- Right now we are finishing up the last episodes of the first season and putting our pitch together for Season # 2. It would be great to try our hand at a TR feature but there are no current plans for one.

DL- Do you have any unforfilled aspirations in this field or any other?

RR- I've been blessed with a much better career than I ever hoped for. My greatest aspiration was to have my own show. Now I'm focused on making it the best show I can. I don't have a lot of time to think about the future. I'll worry about it when TR is done.

DL- What advice would you give to someone looking to sell their own animated creation as a series?

RR- First decide if having your own show is something you really want. Because the process of making a creator-driven show is an all consuming endeavor. Unless you truly love what you are creating you will never make it through the process. It is a labor of love with the emphasis on the labor.

Now, if you decide that you truly want your own show it becomes a matter of tenacity. You need to show your devotion and energy to those who can make your show a reality. And you will need to show it again and again. It also helps to have some kind of track record in the industry. Work well and hard on other people's shows. Gain a reputation. If you go in as a rookie, you will need to be much more brilliant and fantastic.

Also be careful of compromising too much at the beginning of the process. You need to know how to adapt and apply criticism without damaging the core of your idea. If their ideas or desires don't fit with your show then move on. Six weeks or six months down the road their needs will change. What was a rejection may become a green light to go to series.

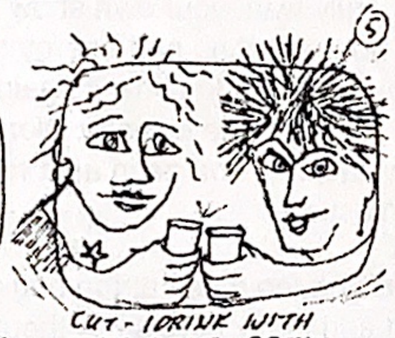
Irra Verbitsky draws KROK 10

FADE IN
I AM INVITED FOR A TWO WEEK CRUISE - EXPENSES PAID.

TRUCK OUT TO THIS POS. AKA THE BOOZE CRUISE. XMASS.

BY: IRRA VERBITSKY
FLASHBACKS FROM MY PAST: "STARRY NIGHT" U.S.A.

CUT - I DRINK WITH YURI NORSTEIN - RUSSIA "THE TALE OF TALES"



CUT - I DRINK WITH TIM COLE - GREAT BRITAIN "MINING FOR MUYBRIDGE"

CUT - I DRINK WITH SAYOKO KINOSHITA - JAPAN DIRECTOR OF THE HIROSHIMA FILM FESTIVAL

CUT - I DRINK WITH JAMES M. BOEKBINDER THE NETHERLANDS "KOLOBOK"

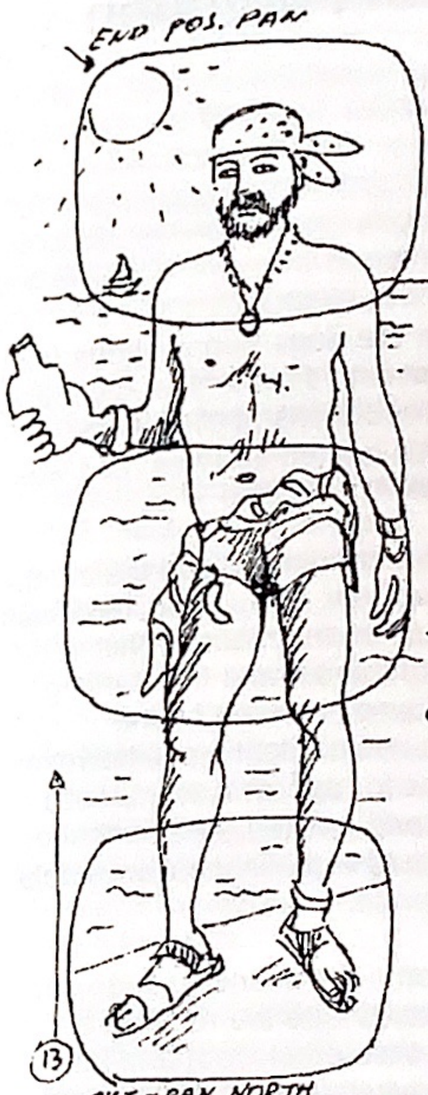
CUT - I DRINK WITH OLIVIER MARCOEN BELGIUM "MAMEMO"

SWISH PAN EAST AND HIS FRIEND MANOU - FRANCE. RUNS IN FROM O.S.

CUT - I DRINK WITH NAOMI WILSON - DIRECTOR BRIAN DOYLE - MUSIC IRELAND "REHY FOX"

CUT - I DRINK WITH YAKOV YAVNO - U.S.A. SINGER - EVEN THOUGH HE DOESN'T DRINK

XDISS. I DRINK SO MUCH THAT I THINK I DRINK WITH SYLVAIN CHOMET BELGIUM - CANADA - FRANCE "TRIO FROM BELLEVILLE" BUT I AM NOT SURE THAT HE IS ON BOARD.



CUT - PAN NORTH I DRINK WITH IVAN MAXIMOV RUSSIA "THE SLOW BISTRO"

CUT - PAN EAST. I DRINK WITH NANCY AND NIK PHELPS OF THE SPROCKET ENSEMBLE. U.S.A.

CUT - I DRINK WITH MIKHAIL TUMELYA - BELARUS - JURY "A BALL"

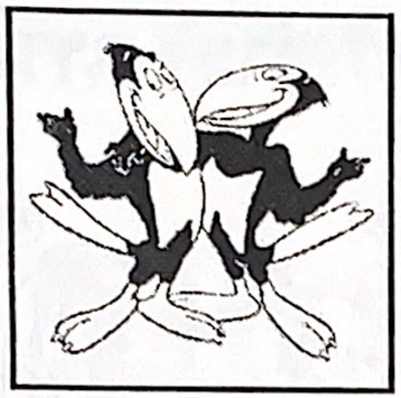
CUT - I DRINK WITH ALEXANDR ZHUKOV UKRAINE - "ALTERNATIVE WORLD'S MODEL"

CUT - I DRINK WITH GYPSY KATARINA LILQUIST FINLAND. JURY. "ROMANY FAIRYTALES"

CUT - ANDREY OVCHINNY SUVOROV RUSSIA - USA BUYS ME A DRINK AND WE DRINK. "MONEY"

CUT - I DRINK WITH THEODORE USHEV - CANADA BULGARIA "WELL TEMPERED HEADS" (WE DRINK AFTER CHURCH OFCOURSE)

XDISS. TO: SHIP GENERAL VATUTIN. THERE ARE 130 FILMS 100 ANIMATORS AND NOT ENOUGH SPACE TO INCLUDE ALL. FADE OUT.



Terrytoons:
Gone but Not Forgotten

by Richard Gorey

To many people, "animation" means Disney films, or the Bugs Bunny shorts from Warner Bros. It's too bad the films created by the animators, writers, and creative staff at the Terrytoons are less often mentioned in discussions of classic and classical animation. Producer Paul Terry's motto often quoted and repeated was, "Disney is the Tiffany's in this business, and I am the Woolworth's."

But in the end, despite Terry's modest ambitions, his creations - and the contributions of his largely anonymous staff- have outlived him. The young Terry was fascinated with both the process and the possibilities of animation. In his early years, Terry grew in direct proportion to his contemporaries, and his startling output one cartoon completed every week was astounding, even by the slapdash standards of the day. Terry's successes with his silent films, however, seemed to satisfy his increasingly modest ambitions for approval and artistic fulfillment. Other studios continued experimenting, and pushed the boundaries of the animated cartoon, but Terry's films, once he had established a workable formula, remained simple and genial.

He resisted the innovation of sound when it came onto the scene (though some have suggested this may have been a clever ploy to escape the restrictive confines of the Van Beuren Studios, where he was then employed) and later delayed shooting his cartoons in Technicolor- even when it became apparent this would make them more marketable. Terrytoons, once contracted, were delivered "like a bottle of milk" every two weeks, according to Joe Barbera: "He (Terry) delivered them on time, and didn't worry."

While it's likely true that many of the shorts produced by Terry are pedestrian, the contributions of his artists and directors (and musician, Philip Scheib) often outclassed their origins. Other studios' cartoons may have been more astute in their scripts, more assured in their humor, and more accomplished in their visuals, but the Terrytoons are remarkable for their macabre, dreamlike atmosphere, Victorian morality, and oddly claustrophobic trappings. There's something curiously oppressive at work beneath the surface of the Terrytoon films. At times, this can be off-putting, but whether an asset of liability, this quality of "surreal reality" is the defining characteristic of a studio whose ratio of bad to good films may have a lot to do with the sheer number produced over the years. (Over 1,000 films, in all, theatrically).

Terry's studio, which had been operating out of Manhattan, was relocated in New Rochelle, New York, after 1934. It's likely that, once the studio grew to a capacity required for delivering the contracted cartoons, more space was needed, and space could be gotten cheaper in Westchester. One wonders, in retrospect, if this kind of physical isolation from the bulk of the animation community (in California) kept Terry from adapting to change as other studios were forced to. It's been said by many people that Terrytoons "existed in a vacuum" from the thirties to the fifties. Seen in a row, or separately, it's hard to distinguish the films made in 1937 from those made in the early fifties. It's doubtful that anyone looking at the Warners, MGM, or Disney product would claim the same confusion. Is this a result of complacency, or is it evidence that Terry had found a style that suited him, and, having discovered his niche, thrived within it? Bright, colorful, cheerful- and affable, the Mighty Mouse cartoons delivered a familiar (and unmistakably religious) moral to moviegoers, which remained essentially unchanged for the twenty years these films were in theatrical circulation.

Terry had common sense and vision enough to surround himself with talented, creative, and inventive people whose skills often surpassed his (at least artistically if not financially). He knew, for instance, that Bill Tytla, a giant among animators, had been suffering since a bitter strike at the Disney studios had eroded the goodwill between management and talent. Terry cultivated Tytla with- well, religious fervor, and hoped that the animator might bring something of the power, resonance, and craftsmanship that characterized his work to the cartoons produced in New Rochelle. Unfortunately, the schedules at Terrytoons (not to mention the budgets and resources) were not as elaborate as they had been at Disney's, and, some felt, Tytla's spirit had been defeated by the stress of the Disney strike. Whatever the case, his time at the Terrytoon factory was not a happy one for Tytla, and though he directed several shorts, he left after a little over a year. The few films Tytla left behind stand out as superior entries into established series, and serve as wistful examples of what might have been, had such extraordinary talents as his been given more freedom and the luxury of larger budgets.

The atmosphere at the Terrytoons plant was informal, but somewhat restrictive, according to some of the artists who worked there. Beckerman recalled recently; "Before you took a new pencil, you had to turn in the old one, and when you wanted more paper, you had to ask for it; it was doled out in dribs and drabs. Well, it was a small 'mom-and-pop' operation, so you could understand the need for economy. They just didn't have the budgets and the time others did. So you made due."

Doug Crane, an animator who has worked within the industry for forty-seven years, has similar recollections of the austere mindset of the New Rochelle plant. If, Crane's tenure (under the formidable Bill Weiss, a producer who took over after Terry retired) was sometimes even more rocky: "You'd go in and ask for a five-dollar-a-week raise, and you'd be told they couldn't: that if you quit and went into Manhattan for more money, you'd have to pay for traveling, and gas and such, and it would just even out." Crane shrugs good-naturedly. "They were right, in a way."

Terry hired many of his later animators from the ranks of the recently graduated art students from local colleges. Crane, who had graduated with honors from Manhattan's Art Student's League, spent his early professional years at Terrytoons, and recalls that despite his education, "Oh, you never started as an animator. You were a cel washer, or an inker." He laughs, then continues, "You started out by sweeping the floors, then you worked your way up."

Many of these up-and-coming artists contributed their own sensibilities to the films, and the stories. Sometimes animators were transferred to the story department, to stir things up. I. Klien remembers that although Terry had an official "story department", he considered himself the creative force behind most of the cartoons' plots and twists. Others contributed gags, or characters, but Terry himself decided which films would be made, and which characters would be developed.

Terry attributed Mighty Mouse's appeal to the curiously Biblical undercurrents in the plots, saying, to Leonard Maltin: "If you go back through history, when a person is down and there's no hope, you say 'It's in God's hands, now.' So, taking that as a basis, I'd only have to get the mice in a tough spot, and they say, 'Is there someone who can help?' 'Yes, there is someone. It's Mighty Mouse!' So down from the heavens he'd come...and lick the evil spirit, or whatever it was, and everything would be made serene again." Then, dismissing this intriguing symbolism, he continued, shrugging, "It was a pattern made thing."

I'm not so sure I disagree with Terry's assessment, but the films have survived, I believe, because of the satisfaction the audience derived from seeing the villains pummeled at the end of each story. Many people decry the series' predictability, but perhaps its greatest strength (and its longevity) rests in the pleasurable anticipation of a gleefully physical revenge, delivered with flair and energy by a much smaller opponent. The beloved Popeye cartoons also followed this pattern, with the admitted advantage of having Popeye himself be the injured party. Mighty Mouse, as several historians have noted, appears only at the very climax of his own films, enjoying the least amount of screen time of any of the classic cartoon stars. This isolation from the previous action (and by extension, this emotional distance from the villains) was a weakness, but a weakness unimportant to the millions who patronized the Mighty Mouse cartoons throughout the forties and fifties. They've survived because they create a feeling of comfort in audiences. I believe this is the same comfort factor that has made Scooby-Doo so revered. People know how it's all going to end, and they like that sometimes.

Terry felt the more offbeat entries in the Mighty Mouse series, in which the hero saved the sinking Hesperus, or the inhabitants of Johnstown from the famous flood, were failures, because the audience was cheated of the "revenge" aspect of the more traditional "bully" scenarios. Ironically, these surreal, macabre, and wildly memorable cartoons, with their overtly theological subtext, are among the most distinctive the studio produced during this or any time. They were, quite literally, like nothing else being done in those years. The Wreck of the Hesperus, for instance, is just plain weird: turning the epic tragic poem on its' ear by substituting a happy ending for the established downer audiences and readers have always known. What power does Mighty Mouse have over the elements of nature? Is he a superhero, an omniscient cop, or a God-like figure? He seems to be all of these things, and yet, his personality is so one-dimensional that the tantalizing implications of such a character go sadly unexplored. These crazily Wagnerian films ask more questions than they answer, but what is unsaid within them, curiously, makes for cerebral, obtuse, and grandly melodramatic films that demand further study from serious buffs.It took the arrival of the characters of Heckle and Jeckle, two talking magpies, for Terrytoons to achieve what many observers felt was its' zenith. Indeed, in some observers' eyes, Heckle and Jeckle were the closest thing Terry ever created to Bugs Bunny, cartoondom's reigning King and most enduring wiseacre. The appearance of these twin antagonists at a studio like Terry's is worthy of note. Anyplace else, they might have been par for the course: at Terrytoons, Heckle and Jeckle were a revelation.

Heckle and Jeckle were antagonistic, and playfully mischievous, unlike many other Terrytoons stars, who were either victims or passive, law-abiding heroes. Handsomely produced, energetically paced, and acted with verve by a talented voice cast, the Heckle and Jeckle cartoons are easily Terry's crowning achievement. These characters are animated with style and personality: there is even a hint of the kind of subtlety in expression and interaction that Chuck Jones would later explore in his Road Runner cartoons.

Even into the fifties, background artists Art Bartsch and Anderson Craig were rendering the forests and towns in the Terrytoons with the same loving care and delicacy that had become a standard since the early Technicolor films in the thirties. Though the recruiting of new animators from untutored ranks of college graduates resulted in some sloppy work- even in the more polished films- the Terrytoons were still fully-animated until well after the UPA revolution had dictated graphic changes and a streamlined simplicity at other studios.

Some saw this classical feeling in the settings as an asset- others point to it as evidence that the Terrytoons were in a creative rut. But it's hard to dismiss some of the more elaborate and intriguing cartoons from that era as assembly-line mediocrities. Directors like the talented Connie Rasinski and Mannie Davis managed to imbue their films with stories and artwork that while remaining within the structure of the Terrytoons style- nonetheless delivered to audiences entertaining and somewhat sumptuous experiences in theaters. Films like Frankenstein's Cat, a Mighty Mouse effort that is truly disturbing and haunting, and Bulldozing The Bull, with Heckle and Jeckle, compare favorably to films from any other studio, both in terms of their humor and their lush, colorful settings.

The loyalty felt keenly by several staff-members and employees over the years was seriously compromised when Terry sold his interests and library of films to CBS in 1955. Many longtime directors and animators who'd been led to believe they'd see a share of the film's financial profits were devastated by the decision, and left out of the deal.

"He got everything," said Mannie Davis, in 1970. "He got all the money, he got all the glory. He had everybody's talent- he inherited all that for himself. He kept it; he's going to take it with him when he dies. I might sound a little bitter, but I am."

Though one can sympathize with Mannie Davis' frustration at not being rewarded for his tenure at the studio, the situation was no different at the other cartoon factories. Chuck Jones, for instance, has said Jack Warner, when approached to share the profits from the Bugs Bunny cartoons, said "What for? They're my films. It says 'Property of Warner Bros.' on each film. I own them. They're mine, and I'm not giving them away." After Terry's departure from the studio, it was managed by Bill Weiss, Terry's former business partner. Weiss was not as well-regarded as was Terry, and the restrictive budgets and schedules were made even more tight in light of the industry's failing fortunes upon the advent of television. Gene Deitch, a television commercial director who had honed his skills at UPA, was brought on to restructure the staff and to breathe new life into the Terrytoons product.

Deitch only stayed two years at Terry's. The tension between him and the established players must have been awful to watch, and impossible to endure. Still, some felt that Deitch, as a producer of commercial animation, had an eye for design, and an ability to promote artists with a strong design sense to the upper ranks. Other radical departures were made at this time as well, but some felt these were too late in coming, like the decision to shoot the new cartoons in Cinemascope, the wide screen process. The "Hashimoto" series, created by veteran staff member Bob Kuwahara animated in the late fifties by Doug Crane, were all shot wide, and these cartoons have a handsome, bold look that was new for Terrytoons. New characters emerged, like the happy nebbish Flebus, and the maintenance man Clint Clobber. Tom Terrific, an energetic little boy with a magical hat, also appeared during this period. These shorts were bright, simple, and well-received, though their limited animation look and sparse design were an adjustment to some audiences used to the fully-rendered films of a few years before. A series featuring a henpecked office-worker named John Doormat had bite and sarcasm unlike anything previously seen at Terrytoons, but after Deitch was fired by an unhappy Bill Weiss, the older, more established characters were resurrected, with varying results.

The studio was lucky to have acquired a remarkable young talent in Ralph Bakshi, a New York animator whose first successes came with his series The Mighty Heroes. Bakshi, of course, became one of the towering figures in seventies animation, with films like Heavy Traffic and Fritz the Cat. His savage, irreverent approach to humor and troubled urban characters are already present in the sharp, rambunctious Mighty Heroes cartoons, and one wonders what the conventional Terry might have thought of Bakshi's more controversial feature films.

Doug Crane, when asked to categorize his experience at Terrytoons, said; "I can only define it in comparison to the other jobs I had, later in life. At the time, I had no idea just how positive an experience it was. It was a good education, a great learning experience, and I worked with some brilliant people. Connie Rasinski, Jim Tyer, and others, who were so good at what they did. It was a nice atmosphere to work in -despite some of the restrictions- and I had some laughs."

Crane, who went on to thrive successfully as a freelance animator, harbors no resentments against the limitations imposed by the Terrytoons environment. "Where else could you get that kind of an education, in New York? There was no School of Visual Arts, no Parsons School of Design, back then," he says, and Howard Beckerman agrees: "In retrospect, it was the best place to start out, at that time, unless you wanted to go to California- and a lot of people didn't. Many of the big names in New York animation got their start at Terrytoons." In the end, this may be Paul Terry's most significant legacy: that he created an environment in which talent like Bakshi, Beckerman, Klein, Rasinski, Crane, Davis, and others could develop and flourish. Most of these animators, directors, and writers went on to other high-profile projects after their tenure at Terrytoons had expired: Bakshi to a series of spectacular (and controversial) features, Crane to animate on (among other projects) the He-Man series, which was phenomenally successful, and Beckerman to own and operate a thriving commercial animation company.In the end, despite Paul Terry's assertion that he was "The Woolworth's of the industry", his work has survived and endured, and his East Coast studio offered a stylistic and contextual alternative to the cartoons produced a country (and a universe) away, in California.

"He created good art for the masses," Howard Beckerman says. "He knew what he was, and what his contribution would be, and there's nothing wrong with that. He had a sense of humor, and a sensibility that matched what the public wanted to see."

Jacob Burns Film Center presents:
Terrytoons: Mighty Mouse over Westchester
Tues., Nov. 18 at 7:00

Decades of Hollywood publicity have obscured the fact that cartoons have been made in New York since around 1900. Among the pioneers to arrive on the scene early was cartoonist and photographer Paul Terry, who in 1934 moved his Terrytoon organization to New Rochelle. This was the birthplace of his most popular characters, including Mighty Mouse and Heckle and Jeckle. These beloved characters, along with Deputy Dawg, Tom Terrific, and others will be featured in our screening of 1931-61 Terrytoons shorts. In addition, we will show Paul Terry's rarely seen silent short How Animation Is Made. Total running time: approximately 90 minutes. Prints generously provided by Pat Leahy, Bob Lusk and Tom Toth.

***Q & A with animator, writer, and director Howard Beckerman.**

For more information and directions visit www.burnsfilmcenter.org

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